



THE BAHAMAS

Focal Point: Ms. Michelle Sears

1. STATUS OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

The Bahamas, a 100,000 square mile archipelago comprising 700 islands and cays, maintains 166 schools in the public school system, dispersed over 23 islands with 48,646 students enrolled, 3,021 teachers and 365 administrators. School sizes range from 1600 to four students. Driven by efforts to meet the internationally agreed millennium development goals and the Education for All goals, particularly that of providing equitable access to quality education, the Ministry of Education and Technology pays increasing attention to enabling distance learning.

Technology Upgrades

The recently concluded IDB-supported INSPIRE Project has brought a significant boost of hardware, software and the requisite training to support DL. Additional servers, desktops and laptops, projectors and interactive whiteboards have been provided to public schools; existing computer labs have been upgraded and 81 subject-specific labs have been installed throughout 27 secondary schools and all-age schools. The installation of subject-specific labs, supported by revision of high school curricula in the core subjects is intended to enable teachers to extend learning beyond the classroom walls, and ultimately improve student achievement.

Indigenous Resources

The Learning Resources Section of the MOE provides teachers with a variety of curriculum-based multi-media learning and teaching resources. Most notable is the Bahamas Learning Channel (BLC), established in 2006, with initial support from COL, to produce indigenous learning materials, primarily educational videos. The BLC has extended its portfolio to include a fully functional website capable of recorded broadcast, live broadcasts, interactive lessons and feedback capabilities. In January 2015, the BLC intends to launch a 24-hour television channel totally dedicated to the broadcast of educational material in the form of instructional, informational and character-building programmes.

In addition to the resources of BLC, teachers use other electronic learning resources such as a melodic learning package – Tune into Reading, Novanet, Auto Skills and Skills Tutor which have significantly improved the reading levels of under-achieving students at all levels.

Integrating Technology

Teachers are introduced to the pedagogical value of instructional technology from the time they enter the profession. The Future Teachers Programme (FTP) uses online distance learning tools – Skype and Wiz IQ to conduct interviews and to participate in school meetings virtually. A website has also been created for FTP for the real-time dissemination of information to cadets and their advisors. On-going professional development for serving teachers is provided by ICT coordinators in collaboration with curriculum officers to ensure the effective integration of technology into instruction and the promotion of technology planning as part of school improvement initiatives. In preparation for recent technology upgrades, school administrators and teachers received professional development using the COL CCTI curriculum along with a locally developed module, called ICT in Education: Potentials and Possibilities.

Gaining in popularity is the development of communities of practice among teachers and administrators, across public and private schools. Teachers are sharing best practices, creating and sharing indigenous resources, creating and sharing open educational resources and collaborating through groups, blogs and forums, and developing web portals for curriculum and instructional resources. In addition, Curriculum Officers design and share instructional webinars and conduct monthly meetings using technology to enable the participation of teachers resident on islands beyond the capital. Additionally, select workshop sessions and presentations are recorded on DVD or CD for sharing with teachers and administrators in remote schools.

Higher Education

At the tertiary level, College of The Bahamas (COB) and University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC) are increasing access to learning through distance learning. COB currently offers college prep programmes online and during the 2014/15 academic year, will introduce an online Diploma in Education, and undergraduate degrees in law, nursing and a variety of general education courses. Since 2011, UWI Open Campus has offered professional education, certification, undergraduate and continuous education study programmes using distance, blended and face-to-face, and each year continues to expand its offerings.

2. HOW CAN COL HELP CURRENT INITIATIVES

- Partner with COB to pilot a BYOD using the “Aptus Classroom without walls” technology.
- Continue with technical assistance with the preparation of policy documents (e.g. The College of The Bahamas in planning for change and writing the Strategic Plan and national policy document for ODL).
- Provide training in instructional design and online instruction to personnel of COB and the Department of Education (Curriculum Officers, Writing Unit and Distance Learning Unit).
- Provide support in evaluating the impact of distance learning initiatives such as the BLC.

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